

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 250

CG 021 032

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TITLE In the Eye of the Beholder: Self-Esteem and
Children's vs. Parents' Assessments of Parental
Nurturance and Discipline.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Midwestern Psychological Association (60th, Chicago,
IL, April 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) --
Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Authoritarianism; Child Rearing; College Students;
*Discipline; Higher Education; *Parent Child
Relationship; Parenting Skills; Parent Role; *Self
Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Nurturance

ABSTRACT

Past research has implicated the familial variables of parental nurturance and parental discipline in the development of global self-esteem in children. This study examined college students' levels of self-esteem as a function of their own versus their parents' appraisals of parental nurturance and parental authority. Subjects were 128 college students and both of their parents. Students completed a global self-esteem scale, a mother's nurturance scale, a father's nurturance scale, a mother's Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), a father's PAQ, and a demographic information sheet. Each parent completed a nurturance scale and a PAQ. The results revealed that both mother's and father's nurturance (as perceived by the students) were strongly related to self-esteem. Based upon students' appraisals, parental authoritativeness was directly related to self-esteem while parental authoritarianism was inversely related to self-esteem. Students' assessments of parental nurturance and authority were more strongly related to self-esteem than were the parents' assessments of these variables. Results of regression analyses suggest that parental authority may be an important source of parental nurturance information. (Author/NB)

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In the Eye of the Beholder: Self-Esteem and Children's
Vs. Parents' Assessments of Parental Nurturance and Discipline

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ABSTRACT: *Students' levels of self-esteem as a function of their own vs. their parents' appraisals of parental nurturance and parental authority were investigated. Results revealed that: a) both mother's and father's nurturance (as perceived by the students) were strongly related to self-esteem, b) based upon students' appraisals, parental authoritativeness was directly related to self-esteem while parental authoritarianism was inversely related to self-esteem, c) students' assessments of parental nurturance and authority were more strongly related to self-esteem than were the parents' assessments of these variables, and d) regression analyses suggested that parental authority may be an important source of parental nurturance information.*

In studies that have been reported by Coopersmith (1967), Sears (1970), Gecas (1971), and Bachman (1982), the familial variables of parental nurturance and parental discipline have been implicated in the development of global self-esteem in children. In terms of parental nurturance, it was consistently reported in these studies that parents' acceptance, support, and nurturance of their children is positively correlated with their children's self-esteem. In terms of the parental discipline variable, however, results have been less congruous. Sears (1970) and Bachman (1982) reported an inverse relationship between strong parental discipline and children's self-esteem; Coopersmith

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(1967), however, reported higher levels of self-esteem in children when the disciplinary practices employed by parents were firm, clear, and demanding; and Gecas (1971) reported no relationship between his measure of parental discipline and self-esteem.

The primary methodology employed in these studies consisted of phenomenological evaluations of the parental nurturance and discipline they had received. In the present study, measures were taken of both: a) college students' assessments of the parental nurturance and discipline they had received, and b) the parents' assessments of the nurturance and discipline they had rendered.

Method

Subjects

The participation of 201 college students (as part of an introductory psychology course requirement) and both their parents (through mailed questionnaires) was solicited. At least one parent of 48 students declined the opportunity to participate and an additional 25 subjects were eliminated because their parents were divorced or separated. The remaining 128 students (61 females, 67 males) and both their parents completed several questionnaires.

Materials and Procedure

Each college-age participant completed six questionnaires which were presented in randomized order: a) a global self-esteem scale, b) a mother's nurturance scale, c) a father's nurturance scale, d) a mother's Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), e) a father's PAQ, and f) a demographic information sheet. Each parent was asked to complete two questionnaires: a) a nurturance scale and b) a PAQ; each of these questionnaires consisted

of the items from the college students' scales reworded so that each mother and father could evaluate the nurturance and authority she/he afforded the college-age participant.

Self-esteem. Each of the participants completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965). The Total Positive self-esteem score was derived for each subject. As operationalized by Fitts (1965), "persons with high scores tend to like themselves, feel that they are persons of value and worth, have confidence in themselves, and act accordingly. People with low scores are doubtful about their own worth; see themselves as undesirable; ...and have little faith or confidence in themselves" (p. 2). Based upon a standardization sample of 626 people, Fitts (1965) reported a test-retest reliability for the Total Positive self-esteem score of $r = .92$.

Parental nurturance. Concepts and items related to parental nurturance were derived from several sources (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Gecas, 1969; Schaefer & Bell, 1958; Straus & Brown, 1978) and were used to construct 118 questionnaire items. These 118 items were stated from the point of view of an individual evaluating the parental nurturance he/she received. Consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective, it was reasoned that the actual parental behavior to which an individual has been exposed will largely effect that individual to the extent and in the way that he/she perceives that behavior. Therefore, we were interested in appraisals of parental nurturance as perceived by the college-aged participants.

The 118 items were evaluated for duplications and 42 were judged to be restatements of other items. The wording of the remaining 76 items was then balanced to control for a response bias. These 76 items were then presented to 177 undergraduates, who were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point

Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Item-score/total-score correlations were computed for each of these 76 items (Crano & Brewer, 1973), and those 24 statements which yielded an item-score/total-score correlation greater than .70 were retained for the final questionnaire. The wording of three of these 24 items was reversed so that the final version of the Parental Nurturance Scale consisted of 12 positively-stated items and 12 negatively-stated items. Two forms of this questionnaire were constructed, one to measure the degree of mother's nurturance and one to measure the degree of father's nurturance. Test-retest reliabilities based upon the responses of 85 college students over a two-week interval were $r = .92$ for mother's nurturance and $r = .94$ for father's nurturance. Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha values were .95 for mother's nurturance and .93 for father's nurturance ($N = 156$ college students).

Examples of items from this scale are: "My mother/father enjoys spending time with me" and "I feel that my mother/father finds fault with me more often than I deserve." Each parent was asked to complete a reworded nurturance scale. Examples of these items are: "I enjoy spending time with my son/daughter" and "I feel that I find fault with my son/daughter more often than he/she deserves."

Parental authority. The PAQ (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, in press) consists of 10 permissive, 10 authoritarian, and 10 authoritative Likert-type statements. Each of these statements was based upon Baumrind's (1971) explanations of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental prototypes. Test-retest reliabilities ($N = 85$) and Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha values ($N = 156$) were, respectively: $r = .81$ and $r_{tt} = .75$ for

mother's permissiveness, $r = .86$ and $r_{tt} = .85$ for mother's authoritarianism, $r = .78$ and $r_{tt} = .82$ for mother's authoritative-ness, $r = .77$ and $r_{tt} = .74$ for father's permissiveness, $r = .85$ and $r_{tt} = .87$ for father's authoritarianism, and $r = .92$ and $r_{tt} = .85$ for father's authoritative-ness. These reliability and coefficient alpha values are highly respectable given the fact that there are only 10 items per scale.

A sample permissive item completed by each student is: "My mother/father has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want." Alternatively, the parents were asked to respond to: "I have always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want." Items from the students' and parents' authoritarianism scales, respectively, are: "As I was growing up my mother/father did not allow me to question any decision that she/he had made" and "As my children were growing up, I did not allow them to question any decision that I had made." Examples of items from the authoritative scales are: "My mother/father has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable" and "I have always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever one of my children has felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable."

Demographic information. The participants also provided information concerning a) their gender, b) their age, c) whether one of their parents had died, and d) whether their parents were divorced or separated.

Results

Table 1 contains the self-esteem/parental nurturance and the self-esteem/parental discipline bivariate correlation coefficients for both students' appraisals and parents' appraisals of nurturance and discipline. We can

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations of Self-Esteem With Parental Nurturance and Parental Authority for Both Students' and Parents' Appraisals of Nurturance and Authority

	Students' Appraisals							
	NURT-M	NURT-F	PER-M	TAR-M	TAT-M	PER-F	TAR-F	TAT-F
SE	+.54****	+.54****	-.10	-.30***	+.46****	-.09	-.22**	+.41****
	Parents' Appraisals							
	NURT-M	NURT-F	PER-M	TAR-M	TAT-M	PER-F	TAR-F	TAT-F
SE	+.13	+.16	-.14	-.03	+.18*	-.03	-.02	+.23**

Note: SE = Self-Esteem; NURT-M = Mother's Nurturance; NURT-F = Father's Nurturance; PER-M = Mother's Permissiveness; TAR-M = Mother's Authoritarianism; TAT-M = Mother's Authoritativeness; PER-F = Father's Permissiveness; TAR-F = Father's Authoritarianism; TAT-F = Father's Authoritativeness.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .025$ *** $p < .005$ **** $p < .0005$

see in Table 1 that the following students' assessments of nurturance and authority were found to correlate significantly with self-esteem: mother's nurturance ($r = +.54, p < .0005$), father's nurturance ($r = +.54, p < .0005$), mother's authoritarianism ($r = -.30, p < .005$), mother's authoritativeness ($r = +.46, p < .0005$), father's authoritarianism ($r = -.22, p < .025$), and father's authoritativeness ($r = +.41, p < .0005$). However, for the parents' appraisals of nurturance and authority, only mother's authoritativeness ($r = +.18, p < .05$) and father's authoritativeness ($r = +.23, p < .025$) were found to correlate significantly with self-esteem.

Hierarchical regressions of self-esteem on all the variables that yielded significant bivariate correlations with self-esteem, as well as all theoretically appropriate interactions of these variables, were completed, and a summary is reported in Table 2. When entered into the regression equations first, mother's and father's nurturance were associated with 40.5% ($p < .0001$) of the variance in self-esteem. When the order of entry of these two nurturance variables was reversed, father's nurturance accounted for 29.5% of the variance in self-esteem and mother's nurturance accounted for an additional 11% of the variance, thus suggesting that mother's and father's nurturance are equally important in accounting for self-esteem.

The order of entry of the authority variables and the nurturance variables was also reversed; when the nurturance variables were entered into the regression equations after the entry of all of the authority variables, these nurturance variables still explained 15.9% of the variance in self-esteem. These results suggest that much of the effect of parental authority

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses

Independent variables	Dependent variable		
	Self-esteem		
	F(1,111)	p	Partial r^2
NURT-M	65.21	<.0001	.289
NURT-F	26.96	<.0001	.116
TAT-M	1.17	<u>ns</u>	.005
TAT-F	.05	<u>ns</u>	.000
TAR-M	6.65	<.05	.029
TAR-F	.47	<u>ns</u>	.002
TAT-Fs' Rs	9.81	<.005	.042
TAT-Ms' Rs	.80	<u>ns</u>	.003
NURT-M x NURT-F	.78	<u>ns</u>	.003
NURT-M x TAR-F	.17	<u>ns</u>	.001
NURT-M x TAT-F	2.62	<u>ns</u>	.011
NURT-F x TAR-M	1.23	<u>ns</u>	.005
NURT-F x TAT-M	.71	<u>ns</u>	.003
TAR-M x TAR-F	1.85	<u>ns</u>	.008
TAR-M x TAT-F	.17	<u>ns</u>	.001
TAT-M x TAR-F	1.26	<u>ns</u>	.005
TAT-M x TAT-F	.75	<u>ns</u>	.003

Note: NURT-M = Students' Appraisals of Mother's Nurturance; NURT-F = Students' Appraisals of Father's Nurturance; TAT-M = Students' Appraisals of Mother's Authoritativeness; TAT-F = Students' Appraisals of Father's Authoritativeness; TAR-M = Students' Appraisals of Mother's Authoritarianism; TAR-F = Students' Appraisals of Father's Authoritarianism; TAT-Fs' Rs = Fathers' Appraisals of Their Own Authoritativeness; TAT-Ms' Rs = Mothers' Appraisals of Their Own Authoritativeness.

upon self-esteem may be the result of the relationship between parental authority and parental nurturance. It is also worth noting here that two variables significantly increased our predictive ability of self-esteem beyond that afforded by the nurturance variables: students' appraisals of mother's authoritarianism explained an additional 3% ($p < .05$) of the variance in self-esteem and fathers' appraisals of their authoritativeness accounted for another 4% ($p < .005$) of the variance.

Discussion

Clearly parental nurturance (as perceived by the college-age participants) was significantly related to their self-esteem. In fact, mother's nurturance and father's nurturance were associated with over 40% of the variance in self-esteem. Furthermore, father's nurturance explained as much of the variance in self-esteem as did mother's nurturance, thus offering support for Caplan's (1986) contentions:

As long as mothering is assumed to be the only or primary cause of children's psychopathology, then all that remains to be done is to figure out which kind of bad mothering is to blame. This hurts not only mothers and children but also fathers, when we expect too little warmth, humanity, and involvement from them.... [W]e need to acknowledge the enormous personal and social importance and worth of parenting as a role for both women and men (pp. 70, 71).

If the physical and emotional presence of fathers to their children is essential for the development of self-esteem (as the present findings strongly suggest), then it is important that we give greater assent to the capabilities and responsibilities of men for nurturance and involvement within the home.

The present findings suggest a plausible explanation for the discrepancies obtained in previous studies of the relationship between parental authority and self-esteem. Parental authoritativeness in the present study was positively related to self-esteem, while parental authoritarianism was negatively related to self-esteem. These findings suggest that when previous researchers have obtained a direct relationship between parental authority and self-esteem, they may well have been defining and measuring authority as an authoritative variable; however, when an inverse relationship has resulted, it is likely that an authoritarian conception of parental discipline was employed.

Furthermore, the present results suggest that the effects of parental authoritativeness and authoritarianism upon self-esteem may largely be the result of their relationship to parental nurturance. As the hierarchical regression analyses revealed (Table 2), once the effects of mother's nurturance and father's nurturance upon self-esteem were partialled out, only 4% of the variance in self-esteem was associated with the students' appraisals of parental authority. What these results suggest is that parental authoritativeness conveys to the child an impression of worth, acceptance, and approval by his/her parents, while parental authoritarianism conveys to the child dissatisfaction and rejection by his/her parents. Thus the manner in which parental authority is exercised in the home seems to be an important source of nurturance information for the child.

Of special note in the present findings was the fact that children's appraisals of their parents' nurturance and authority were more important to their self-esteem than were their parents' appraisals of nurturance and

authority. These results support those of Gecas and Schwalbe (1986), who have argued that the way events are phenomenologically interpreted by the individual is more psychologically cogent than are the events themselves. Such a symbolic interactionist perspective has been clearly stated by Kagan (1978):

Evaluation of a parent...cannot be answered by observing the parent's behavior.... Like pleasure, pain, or beauty, it [parental love] is in the mind of the beholder. Parental love is a belief held by the child, not a set of actions by a parent (p. 57).

The present findings lend strong empirical support to this cornerstone of symbolic interactionism. Consistent with Cooley's (1902) notion of the "looking glass self" and, more recently, Rosenberg's (1979) conception of "reflected appraisals", an individual's perceptions of parental nurturance and authority have greater influence upon self-esteem than do the parents' estimates of these variables.

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